

Buddy, Can You Spare a Ride?

Ever since last Thursday, you may have noticed that the traffic is a little less congested up here on the hill. You may have gotten that parking spot right in front of ProRobics. The air seems cleaner, too. Well, that's probably because I'm not driving my car for a while.

Yes, my family is one of 25 brave households that have volunteered for the city's Way To Go Seattle project, an effort to reduce automobile use. We have agreed to stop driving our second car for six weeks and see what it's like to get along on one set of wheels.

When I read the newspaper article about this project several weeks ago, I knew we needed to be part of it. We had been falling into the nasty habit of driving everywhere. We were part of the problem of congestion in our neighborhood and it didn't have to be that way.

It was too easy for my son to sleep an extra ten minutes and then whine for me to drive him to McClure. That's five blocks from our house. And when we were late for soccer because my seven-year-old couldn't find his shin guards, we jumped in the car. Another five-block trip.

I needed to show them that we can walk and we should walk. Our schools, stores and playfields are close. We've got great bus service downtown. And biking up Queen Anne Hill is the perfect aerobic workout.

So we are part of a great experiment, the first in the nation, according to the Way To Go staff. As an incentive, the project actually buys back our saved car trips, paying us \$85 a week, the approximate cost of owning and driving a car. With that \$85, we can take the bus, taxis, or use the FlexCar program.

In return, my husband and I must keep a detailed daily travel diary so the program can learn how we got around. Hopefully it will help them create future schemes to get us out of our cars.

How's it going so far? Well, the weather's been pretty good and we're still into the challenge. Our second car hasn't budged. But if we can hold on until December 3rd remains to be seen, so watch my next few columns to see if we're successful.

Parks for Us

I'm not a gardener, but one of my favorite places on the Hill is the Pea Patch at Third North and Boston. I'd much rather see urban farmers working on an open space than another batch of three-story townhouses going up.

But we wouldn't have that Pea Patch or lots of other parks, trails and greenbelts in Seattle if it weren't for a bond issue we voted for back in 1989. I was reminded of that fact when I talked with Bill Blair of the Queen Anne

Community Council's Parks committee about the upcoming Parks for All levy that's on the November ballot.

Bill, a longtime neighborhood activist, worked on the 1989 Open Space initiative and says Parks for All will have the same effect. It will allow the city to purchase some new property and to further develop existing parks and trails.

The beauty of this levy is that it focuses on the needs for parks and open space defined in our neighborhood plan. That's a document people like Bill painstakingly created about four years ago and submitted to the city. Unfortunately, there was little money to give neighborhoods to finance their plans. This levy can make some of those wishes come true, especially for the folks on lower Queen Anne who are particularly open-space-challenged.

Parks are great things to bring neighbors together says Blair. From his work with the city after the '89 Open Space levy, he saw neighborhoods transform parking lots or acres of blackberry bushes into beautiful spaces. These spaces give our city its character and its citizens a place to gather and garden, play ball or just sit and think.

A yes vote for Proposition 1 will allow new playfields, pea patches and green spaces to spring up throughout the city. We all say we want more open space and better parks. Here's our chance to step up and pay for it.

Queen Anne News
Over the Back Fence
November column
By Sharon Griggins

My Life as a Pedestrian

As some of you may remember from last month's column, my family has been part of the City of Seattle's Way to Go program, an effort to reduce automobile use. We pledged to give up our second car for six weeks and walk, bike, bus or beg rides to get around.

I am pleased to report that with only four days to go, our second car has not budged from its parking space. With only a moderate amount of whining and a little help from our friends, we proved that our family of four can live with only one set of wheels.

Now that we are on the verge of declaring victory over wasted car trips, I must admit that I was sure we would be one of the first program drop-outs. Driving my car home after signing a contract to park and leave it for six long weeks, I was panicked. Going without a car seemed like living with one hand tied behind your back—possible, but certainly not comfortable.

But as the weeks went by, it got easier and easier. I began to almost enjoy plotting my carless life. I couldn't drive on my son's field trip to the zoo, so I biked to meet the class there. Even when I had the car, I found myself planning errands so they could all be done in one well-organized trip.

Blessed with the driest November in recent memory, it was easy for us to walk to school, soccer practice, the bank, the video and grocery stores. I came to take perverse pleasure in walking by the weekend traffic backed up on Queen Anne Avenue. As drivers jockeyed for parking spaces at Thriftway to do their Thanksgiving shopping, I strolled by with my little wheeled shopping cart. So it took me three trips to get everything home—I probably would have made that many trips by car anyway.

Lest I paint too rosy a picture of pedestrian life, I must admit that not everything was easy. Weekend use of the car was tough to plan when you have four people who want to go in four different directions. There are also some parts of town that are just plain hard to get to without a car. Try getting to the UW for a night class—too dark to bike, too far to walk, no reasonable bus service and a cab is too expensive.

Although I am a dedicated bike commuter, I can't say Seattle is a bike-friendly city. Off the safety of the Burke-Gilman trail, you often take your life in your hands. You have to have nerves of steel to play chicken with the Metro buses

downtown. In these six weeks I had my share of close calls, including a run-in with a guy in a big Buick who made a rolling stop right into my back wheel.

Although I doubt that I will post a "For Sale" sign on our second car now that we have completed the program, I was glad to have done it. Every day I had to think about alternatives to driving. We walked or biked and felt the freedom of getting places under our own steam. And I don't know if it will last, but the best thing is that we don't automatically reach for the car keys when we walk out the door.

Clean Your Closet, Fill a Stocking

Now that the season of giving is upon us, here's an easy way to contribute to neighbors in need. Abbie Berry, who runs the free dinner program at Bethany Presbyterian, is looking for donations of warm clothing to distribute over the winter months. Take a few minutes to go through your closets to see if there are any coats, sweaters, hats or gloves that you can spare.

While you're at it, go through your bathroom drawers as well. Berry and other volunteers will be making Christmas stockings filled with travel-size toilet articles as well as other personal items like combs, hairbrushes and disposable razors. Donations can be left at the Queen Anne Food Bank or the Wednesday night dinners at Bethany.